

**IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE  
WESTERN DISTRICT OF MISSOURI  
CENTRAL DIVISION**

MARTHA C. LAIRD, )  
Plaintiff, )  
v. ) Case No. 12-4200-CV-DPR  
CAROLYN W. COLVIN, Acting )  
Commissioner of Social Security,<sup>1</sup> )  
Defendant. )

**MEMORANDUM AND ORDER**

An Administrative Law Judge (“ALJ”) denied Social Security Disability Insurance Benefits to Plaintiff Martha C. Laird in a decision dated November 22, 2010 (Tr. 9-17). The Appeals Counsel denied review. Thus, the ALJ’s decision became the Commissioner of Social Security’s final decision denying Social Security Disability benefits. *See* 42 U.S.C. § 405(g); 20 C.F.R. § 416.1481. For the reasons set forth below, the decision of the Commissioner of Social Security is **AFFIRMED**.

**LEGAL STANDARDS**

Judicial review of a denial of disability benefits is limited to whether there is substantial evidence on the record as a whole to support the Social Security Administration’s decision. 42 U.S.C. § 405(g); *Minor v. Astrue*, 574 F.3d 625, 627 (8th Cir. 2009). Substantial evidence is “such evidence as a reasonable mind might accept as adequate to support a conclusion.”

*Richardson v. Perales*, 402 U.S. 389, 401 (1971) (quoting *Consolidated Edison Co. V. NLRB*,

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<sup>1</sup> Carolyn W. Colvin became the Acting Commissioner of Social Security on February 14, 2013. Pursuant to Fed. R. Civ. P. 25(d), Carolyn W. Colvin is substituted for Michael J. Astrue as defendant in this action.

305 U.S. 197, 229 (1938)). “Substantial evidence on the record as a whole,” however, requires a more exacting analysis, which also takes into account “whatever in the record fairly detracts from its weight.” *Minor*, 574 F.3d at 627 (quoting *Wilson v. Sullivan*, 886 F.2d 172, 175 (8th Cir. 1989)). Thus, where it is possible to draw two inconsistent conclusions from the evidence, and one conclusion represents the ALJ’s findings, a court must affirm the decision. *See Robinson v. Sullivan*, 956 F.2d 836, 838 (8th Cir. 1992) (citing *Cruse v. Bowen*, 867 F.2d 1183, 1184 (8th Cir. 1989)). In other words, a court should not disturb an ALJ’s denial of benefits if the decision “falls within the available zone of choice.” *Buckner v. Astrue*, 646 F.3d 549, 556 (8th Cir. 2011). A decision may fall within the “zone of choice” even where the court “might have reached a different conclusion had [the court] been the initial finder of fact.” *Id.* (quoting *Bradley v. Astrue*, 528 F.3d 1113, 1115 (8th Cir. 2008)). A reviewing court is directed to “defer heavily to the findings and conclusions” of the Social Security Administration. *Howard v. Massanari*, 255 F.3d 577, 581 (8th Cir. 2001).

## ANALYSIS

The operative facts and arguments are thoroughly presented in the parties’ briefs and will not be duplicated here. Plaintiff argues that the ALJ erred in determining the claimant’s residual functional capacity (RFC) (Doc. 13). The Court has thoroughly reviewed the claimant’s medical records, opinion evidence, hearing testimony, and the ALJ’s opinion, and finds that the ALJ’s determination is based upon substantial evidence on the record as a whole. The ALJ thoroughly discussed the claimant’s impairments and medical history, opinion evidence, and subjective complaints in calculating her RFC. The ALJ acknowledged that the claimant suffers from lupus, which is a serious, progressive illness, and which will likely cause

the claimant to become disabled in the future. But, he determined that based on the medical evidence, opinions, and her symptoms during the time period at issue, her lupus was not disabling. This was a proper determination. *See Johnson v. Astrue*, 628 F.3d 991, 995 (8th Cir. 2011) (holding that the “critical question” in analyzing disability due to lupus was not whether a claimant’s complaints were “consistent with the medical authorities that describe and discuss the typical effects of lupus,” but whether a claimant’s lupus has “progressed to the point at which it would be disabling”). Despite the existence of some evidence in the record that may support opposite conclusions, the Court finds that the record as a whole reflects substantial evidence to support the ALJ’s RFC determination. As such, the ALJ’s determination falls within the acceptable “zone of choice” of the finder of fact, to which the court gives great deference. Accordingly, the Court will not disturb the ALJ’s denial of benefits.

Therefore, based on all the foregoing, **IT IS ORDERED** that the decision of the Commissioner of Social Security is **AFFIRMED**.

**IT IS SO ORDERED.**

**DATED:** September 4, 2013

/s/ *David P. Rush*  
**DAVID P. RUSH**  
**United States Magistrate Judge**